

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-116 (canceled)

117. (currently amended) An absorbent article comprising:

a topsheet;

a backsheet;

an absorbent core sandwiched between the topsheet and the backsheet;

a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first lateral end and a second lateral end;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first lateral end and a second lateral end, the first lateral end of the back waist portion being disposed adjacent to and spaced apart from the first lateral end of the front waist portion and the second lateral end of the back waist portion being disposed adjacent to and spaced from the second lateral end of the front waist portion;

a crotch portion longitudinally connecting the back and front waist portions, the crotch portion having a first lateral end and a second lateral end;

a first prefolded nonwoven connector that connects the first lateral end of the back waist portion to the first lateral end of the front waist portion;

a second prefolded nonwoven connector that connects the second lateral end of the back waist portion to the second lateral end of the front waist portion;

a first hook fastener strip secured to the first prefolded nonwoven connector and releasably preengaged with the outer surface of the front waist portion and permanently attached to the outer surface of the back waist portion; and

a second hook fastener strip secured to the second prefolded nonwoven connector and releasably preengaged with the outer surface of the front waist portion and permanently attached to the outer surface of the back waist portion.

118. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 117, wherein the first and second lateral ends of the back waist portion and front waist portion are prefolded at least one time, and each of the first and second prefolded nonwoven connectors is connected to a portion of a respective one of the prefolded first and second lateral ends of the back waist portion.

119. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 118, wherein at least the first and second lateral ends of the back waist portion and front waist portion are held in the prefolded condition by a securement means.

120. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 119, wherein the securement means is adhesive.

121. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 117, further comprising crotch elastics extending parallel to side edges of the crotch portion.

122. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 117, wherein the first nonwoven connector and the second nonwoven connector are made of elastic nonwoven or composite elastic nonwoven made of a film layer laminated to at least one nonwoven layer.

123. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 117, wherein the first and second prefolded nonwoven connectors are held in the prefolded condition by a releasable securement means.

124. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 117, wherein the first and second prefolded nonwoven connectors each comprises a first portion connected to a respective lateral end of the back waist portion, the first portion is made of non-elastic nonwoven, and the remaining portions of the first and second prefolded nonwoven connectors are made of elastic nonwoven or a composite elastic nonwoven.

125. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 117, wherein the first and second prefolded nonwoven connectors are prefolded an even number of times.

126. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 118, wherein the absorbent core has a first longitudinal end and a second longitudinal end, and at least one of the first and second longitudinal ends of the absorbent core extends under the portions of the prefolded lateral ends of the back waist portion at which each of the first and second prefolded nonwoven connectors is connected.

127. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 118, wherein the portions of the prefolded lateral ends of the back waist portion at which each of the first and second prefolded nonwoven connectors is connected are at least partially fluid impermeable.

128. (canceled)

129. (currently amended) An absorbent article comprising:
a topsheet;
a backsheet;
an absorbent core sandwiched between the topsheet and the backsheet

a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first prefolded lateral end and a second prefolded lateral end;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first prefolded lateral end and a second prefolded lateral end;

at least one prefolded nonwoven connector, a first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector being permanently attached to the outer surface of the back waist portion, the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector being attached to the back waist portion and held in the prefolded condition by a securement means; and

a first hook fastener disposed at a second portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector and releasably preengaged with the outer surface of the front waist portion.

130. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 129, wherein the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is prefolded an even number of times.

131. (canceled)

132. (previously presented) The absorbent core of claim 131, wherein the absorbent core has a first longitudinal end and a second longitudinal end, and at least one of the first and second longitudinal ends of the absorbent core extends under the portion of

the at least one of the first and second prefolded lateral ends of the back waist portion at which the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is attached.

133. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 129, wherein the first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is made of a non-elastic nonwoven.

134. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 133, wherein the second portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is made of an elastic nonwoven or a composite elastic nonwoven.

135. (canceled)

136. (canceled)

137. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 129, wherein the first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is attached to a vapor permeable, fluid impermeable portion of the back waist portion.

138. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 129, further comprising a second hook fastener disposed at a third portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector and releasably preengaged with the outer surface of the front waist portion.

139. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 138, wherein the first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is disposed between the second portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector and the third portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector and extends across the back waist portion.

140. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 139, wherein the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is of a single, unitary construction.

141. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 139, wherein the first, second and third portions of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector make up separate pieces of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector.

142. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 129, wherein the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is releasably prefolded.

143. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 142, wherein the at least one nonwoven connector is held in the releasably prefolded condition by hot melt adhesive.

144. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 129, wherein the first and second prefolded lateral ends of the front and back waist portions are held in the prefolded condition by a securement means.

145. (previously presented) An absorbent article comprising:
An absorbent article comprising:
a topsheet;
a backsheet;
an absorbent core sandwiched between the topsheet and the backsheet;
a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first lateral end and a second lateral end;
a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first lateral end and a second lateral end, the first lateral end of the back waist portion being disposed adjacent to and spaced apart from the first lateral end of the front waist portion and the second lateral end of the back waist portion being disposed adjacent to and spaced from the second lateral end of the front waist portion;

a crotch portion longitudinally connecting the back and front waist portions, the crotch portion having a first lateral end and a second lateral end;

a first prefolded nonwoven connector that extends from the first lateral end of the back waist portion;

a second prefolded nonwoven connector that extends from the second lateral end of the back waist portion;

a third prefolded nonwoven connector that extends from the first lateral end of the front waist portion;

a fourth prefolded nonwoven connector that extends from the second lateral end of the front waist portion;

a first hook fastener strip secured to the first prefolded nonwoven connector and releasably preengaged with the third prefolded nonwoven connector; and

a second hook fastener strip secured to the second prefolded nonwoven connector and releasably preengaged with the fourth prefolded nonwoven connector.

146. (currently amended) An absorbent article comprising:

a topsheet;

a backsheet;

an absorbent core sandwiched between the backsheet and the topsheet;

a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first prefolded lateral end and a second prefolded lateral end;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first prefolded lateral end and a second prefolded lateral end;

a crotch portion longitudinally connecting the back and front waist portions, the crotch portion having a first prefolded lateral end and a second prefolded lateral end;

at least one prefolded nonwoven connector, a first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector being permanently attached to the outer surface of the back waist portion, the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector being attached to the back waist portion and held in place in the prefolded condition by a securement means; and
a first hook fastener disposed at a second portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector.

147. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 146, wherein the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is prefolded an even number of times.

148. (canceled)

149. (previously presented) The absorbent core of claim 146, wherein the absorbent core has a first longitudinal end and a second longitudinal end, and at least one of the first and second longitudinal ends of the absorbent core extends under the portion of the at least one of the first and second prefolded lateral ends of the back waist portion at which the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is attached.

150. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 146, wherein the first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is made of a non-elastic nonwoven.

151. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 150, wherein the second portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is made of an elastic nonwoven or a composite elastic nonwoven.

152. (canceled)

153. (canceled)

154. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 146, wherein the first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is attached to a vapor permeable, fluid impermeable portion of the back waist portion.

155. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 146, further comprising a second hook fastener disposed at a third portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector and releasably preengaged with the outer surface of the front waist portion.

156. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 155, wherein the first portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is disposed between the second portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector and the third portion of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector and extends across the back waist portion.

157. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 156, wherein the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is of a single, unitary construction.

158. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 156, wherein the first, second and third portions of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector make up separate pieces of the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector.

159. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 146, wherein the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is releasably prefolded.

160. (previously presented) The prefabricated absorbent article of claim 159, wherein the at least one prefolded nonwoven connector is held in the releasably prefolded condition by hot melt adhesive.

161. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 146, wherein the first and second prefolded lateral ends of the front and back waist portions are held in the prefolded condition by a securement means.

162. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 161, wherein the securement means is adhesive.

163. (currently amended) A method of making an absorbent article comprising the steps of:

providing a chassis comprising:

a topsheet;

a backsheet;

an absorbent core sandwiched between the topsheet and the backsheet;

a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface and two lateral ends;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface and two lateral ends; and

a crotch portion longitudinally connecting the front and back waist portions and having two lateral ends;

slitting a nonwoven connector web into a first web portion and a second web portion;

attaching a first hook fastener to a first end of the first web portion and a second hook fastener to a first end of the second web portion;

folding the first and second web portions;

coating a second end of the first web portion and a second end of the second web portion with an adhesive;

folding at least once inwardly the two lateral ends of the back waist portion and the two lateral ends of the front waist portion; and

permanently attaching the second end of the first web portion to one of the two lateral ends of the outer surface of the back waist portion to form a first nonwoven connector and permanently attaching the second end of the second web portion to another one of the two lateral ends of the outer surface of the back waist portion to form a second nonwoven connector.

164. (previously presented) The method of claim 163, further comprising:
coating a portion of the two folded lateral ends of the back waist portion with adhesive before attaching the first and second web portions.

165. (previously presented) The method of claim 163, wherein the first and second web portions are retained in the folded condition and attached to the back waist portion with hot melt adhesive or heat seal.

166. (previously presented) The method of claim 163, further comprising:
securing the two lateral ends of at least one of the front waist portion and the back waist portion with an adhesive or heat seal.

167. (previously presented) The method of claim 163, further comprising:
folding the chassis perpendicular to its longitudinal axis such that each of the two prefolded lateral ends of the back waist portion is disposed in adjacent and spaced apart relation to a respective one of the two prefolded lateral ends of the front waist portion; and
releasably engaging each of the first and second hook fasteners with the outer surface of the front waist portion.

168. (currently amended) A method of making an absorbent article comprising the steps of:

providing a chassis comprising:
a topsheet;
a backsheet;
an absorbent core sandwiched between the topsheet and the backsheet;
a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface and two lateral ends;
a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface and two lateral ends; and

a crotch portion longitudinally connecting the front and back waist portions and having two lateral ends;

attaching a first hook fastener to a first end of a nonwoven connector web and a second hook fastener to a second end of the nonwoven connector web;

folding the first and second ends of the nonwoven connector web;

coating a portion of the nonwoven connector web with an adhesive;

folding the two lateral ends of the back waist portion, the two lateral ends of the front waist portion and the two lateral ends of the crotch portion; and

permanently attaching the portion of the nonwoven connector web to the outer surface of the back waist portion to form a nonwoven connector.

169. (previously presented) The method of claim 168, further comprising:

folding the chassis perpendicular to its longitudinal axis such that each of the two prefolded lateral ends of the back waist portion is disposed in adjacent and spaced apart relation to a respective one of the two prefolded lateral ends of the front waist portion; and

releasably engaging each of the first and second hook fasteners with the outer surface of the front waist portion.

170. (previously presented) The method of claim 168, further comprising:

coating a portion of the two folded lateral ends of the back waist portion with adhesive before attaching the nonwoven connector web.

171. (previously presented) The method of claim 168, wherein the first and second web portions are retained in the folded condition and attached to the back waist portion with hot melt adhesive or heat seal.

172. (previously presented) The method of claim 168, further comprising:
securing the two lateral ends of at least one of the front waist portion and the back waist portion and in the folded condition with an adhesive or heat seal.

173. (currently amended) A method of making an absorbent article comprising the steps of:

moving a chassis in a first direction, the chassis comprising:

a topsheet;

a backsheet;

an absorbent core sandwiched between the top sheet and the backsheet;

a back waist portion having an inner surface an outer surface and two lateral ends;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface and two lateral ends; and

a crotch portion longitudinally connecting the front and back waist portions and having two lateral ends;

moving a unitary nonwoven connector web parallel to the first direction, the unitary nonwoven connector web comprising a first portion, a second portion and a third portion, the second portion being disposed between the first portion and the third portion;

attaching a first hook to the first portion of the unitary nonwoven connector web and a second hook to the third portion of the unitary nonwoven connector web;

folding the first and third portions of the unitary nonwoven connector web and securing the folds in place;

permanently attaching the second portion of the unitary nonwoven connector web to the outer surface of the back waist portion of the chassis; and

folding the two lateral ends of the back waist portion and the two lateral ends of the front waist portion longitudinally at least once inwardly.

174. (previously presented) The method of claim 173, wherein the step of attaching the second portion of the unitary nonwoven connector web to the outer surface of the back waist portion comprises coating hot melt adhesive on one side of the second portion of the unitary nonwoven connector web.

175. (previously presented) The method of claim 173, wherein the step of attaching the second portion of the unitary nonwoven connector web to the outer surface of the back waist portion comprises coating hot melt adhesive at least intermittently on the outer surface of the back waist portion.

176. (previously presented) The method of claim 173, wherein the second portion of the unitary nonwoven connector web is attached to the outer surface of the back waist portion by using heat seal.

177. (previously presented) The method of claim 173, further comprising releasably securing the two lateral ends of the front waist portion and the two lateral ends of the back waist portion in the folded condition with a hot melt adhesive or heatseal.

178. (previously presented) A method of making an absorbent article comprising the steps of:

providing a chassis comprising:

a topsheet;

a backsheet;

an absorbent core sandwiched between the topsheet and the backsheet;

a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface and two lateral ends;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface and two lateral ends; and

a crotch portion longitudinally connecting the front and back waist portions and having two lateral ends;

slitting a first nonwoven connector web into a first web portion and a second web portion;

attaching a first hook fastener to a first end of the first web portion and a second hook fastener to a first end of the second web portion;

folding the first and second web portions;

coating a second end of the first web portion and a second end of the second web portion with an adhesive;

folding at least once inwardly the two lateral ends of the back waist portion and the two lateral ends of the front waist portion;

attaching the second end of the first web portion to one of the two lateral ends of the back waist portion to form a first nonwoven connector and attaching the second end of the second web portion to another one of the two lateral ends of the back waist portion to form a second nonwoven connector;

slitting a second nonwoven connector web into a third web portion and a fourth web portion;

folding the third and fourth web portions;

attaching a first end of the third web portion to the first hook fastener;

attaching a first end of the fourth web portion to the second hook fastener;

coating a second end of the third web portion and a second end of the fourth web portion with an adhesive; and

attaching the second end of the third web portion to one of the two lateral ends of the front waist portion to form a third nonwoven connector and attaching the second end of the fourth web portion to another one of the two lateral ends of the front waist portion to form a fourth nonwoven connector.

179. (previously presented) A pre-fastened absorbent article comprising:

a topsheet;

a back sheet;

an absorbent core sandwiched between the top sheet and the backsheet;

a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first prefolded lateral end and a second prefolded lateral end;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first prefolded lateral end and a second prefolded lateral end, the back waist and front waist lateral ends being retained in the prefolded condition by at least one of adhesive and heat seal;

a prefolded unitary nonwoven connector having a prefolded first portion, a second portion and a prefolded third portion, the second portion being disposed between the prefolded first portion and the prefolded second portion, the prefolded first and third portions being retained in the prefolded condition by at least one of adhesive and heat seal, the second portion of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector being attached permanently to the outer surface of the back waist portion so as to cover the full width of the back waist portion; and

a first hook fastener disposed at an end portion of the prefolded first portion and a second hook fastener disposed at an end portion of the prefolded third portion such that when the absorbent article is folded laterally, the first and second hook fasteners engage the outer surface of the front waist portion.

180. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the absorbent core is rectangular.

181. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the first, second and third portions of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector make up three separate pieces that are joined together.

182. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the second portion of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector is nonelastic and the first and third portions are elastic single layer spunbond nonwoven or a composite of at least two layers.

183. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the prefolded nonwoven connector is breathable.

184. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the first and the third prefolded nonwoven connectors are secured in place and together by a releasable securement means such as adhesive or heat seals.

185. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the absorbent core has a first longitudinal end and a second longitudinal end, and at least one of the first and second longitudinal ends of the absorbent core extends under a portion of at least one of the first and second lateral ends of the back waist portion at which the second portion of the prefolded nonwoven connector is attached.

186. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the prefolded lateral ends of the front and back waist portions are folded at least twice.

187. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claims 179, wherein the second portion of the nonwoven connector is attached to a portion of the back waist portion that is fluid impermeable.

188. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 179, wherein the second portion of the nonwoven connector is attached to a portion of the back waist portion that is partially fluid impermeable and partially fluid permeable.

189. (previously presented) A prefastened absorbent article comprising:

a top sheet;

a back sheet;

an absorbent core sandwiched between the top sheet and the back sheet;

a back waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first lateral end and a second lateral end;

a front waist portion having an inner surface, an outer surface, a first lateral end and a second lateral end;

a prefolded unitary nonwoven connector having a prefolded first portion, a second portion and a prefolded third portion, the second portion being disposed between the prefolded first portion and the prefolded second portion, the prefolded first and third portions being retained in the prefolded condition by at least one of adhesive and heat seal, the second portion of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector being attached permanently to the inner surface of the back waist portion so as to cover the full width of the back waist portion;

a first hook fastener disposed at an end portion of the prefolded first portion and a second hook fastener disposed at an end portion of the prefolded third portion such that when the absorbent article is folded laterally, the first and second hook fasteners engage one of the inner and outer surfaces of the front waist portion.

190. (previously presented) The prefastened absorbent article of claim 189, wherein the absorbent core is rectangular.

191. (previously presented) The prefastened absorbent article of claim 189, wherein the first, second and third portions of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector make up three separate pieces that are joined together.

192. (previously presented) The prefastened absorbent article of claim 191, wherein at least 90 percent of the second portion of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector is non-elastic nonwoven and the first and third portions are made of a single layer elastic nonwoven or a composite of at least two layers at least one of which is a stretchable film.

193. (previously presented) The prefastened absorbent article of claim 189, wherein the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector is breathable.

194. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 189, wherein the absorbent core has a first longitudinal end and a second longitudinal end, and at least one of the first and second longitudinal ends of the absorbent core extends under a portion of at least one of the first and second lateral ends of the back waist portion at which the second portion of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector is attached.

195. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 189, wherein the lateral ends of the front and back waist portions are folded at least once inwardly.

196. (previously presented) The absorbent article of claim 189, wherein the second portion of the prefolded unitary nonwoven connector is attached to a portion of the back waist portion that is partially fluid impermeable and partially fluid permeable.